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Report About Trip To East Timor

16-27-7 and
14-15-7-1992 (Oecussi)

Getting There:

Although the Indonesian Embassy in Bonn had confirmed in writing that a special permit was not necessary in order to travel to East Timor, we still had problems getting there.
After we`d travelled without any problems to Pantemacassar (Oecussi) we were surprised that the ticket agent there didn`t want to sell us a ticket to Dili. The only reason given was a vague mentioning of the police. However, we got a ticket as far as Atambua (West Timor). Once we were there we managed to get a ticket to Dili but then 5 minutes later it was taken away from us. It seemed the only way left was for us to fly. We were told we needed a travel permit (surat jalan) for the bus but couldn`t get this in Atambua. The only place we could get this was KOREM (the regional military command) in Kupang. So we had to go back to Kupang in the bus (an 8hour journey). However, once there the officer we spoke to said, that his senior officer was in Bali and as he was the only person allowed to administer the permit, we still couldn`t get one! The only possibilities left were to fly or go by ship.
On 16.7.1992 we flew to Dili at a cost of 73,100 Rp each instead of 11,5000 Rp by bus (1 sterling = about 3,000 Rp)
Photos were taken of us and the other western tourist as we got out of the plane!

Hotels:

In Dili there are enough hotels for the small number of touriststhere. Prices are relatively high though. The cheapest was the losmen (=small pension) Mona Lisa in the area of Becora, 3 km from the centre of Dili, at 5,000 Rp each.
There`s only one hotel in Baucau the "Hotel Baucau" (also known as Hotel Flamboyan) at 15,000 Rp for a double room. There`s also a losmen next to the bus station at 6,000 Rp for a double but the sanitary facilities are pretty bad.
In Lospalos there`s one losmen although we only found out about this through the local priest. Other people seemed too scared to tell us. This was 6,000 Rp per person.
In Vique_que there`s a losmen-type accomodation provided by the police at 2,500 Rp per person.
Apart from in Dili and Baucau we had to register with the police on arrival. We even did this in Lautem where we spent less than 1/2hour whilst waiting for the bus.
Theoretically it`s possible to stay overnight at the Catholic churches. But this may cause problems (such as interrogation by the police) for the priests, so it`s better to ask about accomodation at the police station.

Police and Army Controls:

There are army controls just outside Dili where all bus passengers must show the passports/identity cards when travelling to and from Dili.

On coming back from a day-trip to Ermera we were virtually interrogated as to whether we'd spoken to anyone there and as to what our professions were. During a visit to Quelicai we were accompanied almost the whole time by a plain clothes officer and were deterred from going for a walk into the mountains.
However, passing the control point in a car of the Santo Paulus Educational Trust we were allowed to pass through without stopping!

At the tourist information centre we were told that it wasn't possible to go to Atauro (island just off Dili coast). Later we found out that it was possible to charter a fishing boat there, although we didn't do this.

Tourism:

East Timor is very positively portrayed in official tourist brochures. We'd been sent a large colour brochure of East Timor from Garuda before our trip. However, once there we had many doubts about how far the Indonesian Government really wanted to attract tourists to East Timor, especially outside of Dili.

Comparision Of West And East Timor:

Whoever flies from Kupang to Dili, notices the difference straight away. Kupang is a busy city with loud night markets and small buses (bemos) that play loud music and seem to run the whole night through. Dili is in contrast sleepy.
After 7pm there are no more buses, only taxis. There are also no long distance night buses (in contrast to West Timor). To get from Dili to Suai in the South West of East Timor you have to stay the night in Atambua to get the connecting bus in the morning. There are night buses through from Atambua to Kupang. In Baucau, evenings and nights are even quieter than in Dili.

Conditions Of Roads And Transport:

The usual means of transport are medium sized buses and sometimes small trucks (which are even less comfortable than buses but no cheaper). The so-called "Trans-Timor-Highway" from Kupang to Lospalos is in a pretty bad state (in contrast Java's roads are of European standards). The road is not surfaced at all or covered in water. Therefore journeys take a long time. As in Indonesia children of ten work in buses, collecting money and passengers. The most remote areas are not reachable by public transport.

Travelling In Remote Areas:

Outside of Dili we only saw two other tourists in Baucau and one in Oecussi. For that reason we often found ourselves to be the centre of attraction. In Lospalos we were encircled by dozens of children as well as adults. In Quelicai, apart from a few daring children, people's interest tended to be outweighed by shyness.
We always had the impression that we could bring members of the church into trouble with the police because of our contacting them. Sometimes this was directly said to us - as in Lospalos where the priest and other members of the church had been recently questioned for contact with tourists but most of the time we inferred this by the [redacted] cautious and often evasive way in which our questions were answered.

Contact With Inhabitants:

A lot less adults than in Bali or Java initiated conversations with us apart from saying "hello". The few East Timorese that did speak in any depth spoke about politics.
During a 15 minutes stop at the bus station in Baucau an East Timorese student suddenly came up to us and told us how he'd been at the Santa Cruz funeral and had lost many friends through the massacre. He also said that the Indonesian security forces were still continueing to arrest and even kill members of the opposition. He estimated the total number of people to have died as a result of Santa Cruz to be up to 400. He said he was now organizing clandestinely and that there might be another demonstration at some time to remember those killed in the massacre. An Indonesian civilian [redacted] tried to interrupt the conversation by coming up to us and inviting us for tea! Later a soldier came and stood by us as the student continued to speak. That we got the information we did in the short time we were there only shows the determination of the East Timorese to inform the outside world of the situation there.
Another time a young Timorese told us in a bus in Dili that his father was in exile in Portugal.
In Lospalos we spoke with a family who were against the Indonesian occupation. The son had been arrested for taking part in a demonstration.
We had another interesting conversation with someone working for the Santo Paulus Educational Trust. He told us of his work with orphans and the need for money as well as the forced contraception of women that has taken place in East Timor.
We also spoke with Indonesians living in East Timor, e.g. some people from Flores, now living in Lospalos. Apart from a few exceptions the negative comments on the situation in East Timor came from Timorese whereas the portrayal of there being no problems in East Timor came from Indonesians.

Indonesian Presence:

The day after we arrived in Dili on the 17.7.1992 there was an official military ceremony in front of the governor`s palace to celebrate the anniversary of the integration of East Timor into Indonesia. There were people in traditional costume from all areas of East Timor, according to an Indonesian who was standing next to us.
Later we heard from an East Timorese, however, that the people were obliged to take part in the ceremony and that some of the supposedly East Timorese were not even East Timorese. In Dili and the whole of East Timor we constantly noticed the sea of red and white flags.As well as that there were many banners reminding the people of the integration day (17.7) and the Indonesian independence day from the Dutch (17.8.) - the latter being a date which has absolutely no meaning to the East Timorese as it was never a Dutch colony!
On the whole the constant reminders by the state that East Timor was a part of Indonesia appeared artificial and superficial and gave us the impression that the Indonesians were desperate to try to impregnate the minds of the East Timorese.

Contact With The Santo Paulus Educational Trust:

We contacted the Santo Paulus Educational Trust before leaving for East Timor. The trust is responsible for the Catholic schools in East Timor. The director, Father Aureo, was an East Timorese and his assistant was an Indonesian nun.
Almost all of the pupils at the Catholic schools and most of the teachers (at least in the primary schools) were East Timorese. However, in the secondary and high schools more and more teachers were Indonesians.The schools had to follow the Indonesian national

curriculum meaninge.g. the pupils wore the national school uniform (which varied only according to level and day of the week) and sang the national anthem and that lessons were only given in Indonesian and that every school had to fly the Indonesian flag. In fact the only difference of the Catholic of state-run schools was the religious aspect. However, many parents seemed to prefer to have their children going to Catholic schools. Poor parents were helped if necessary to pay the school fees. The most urgent problems were those of money and the inadequate availability of school buildings.
The director and his assistant arranged a tour of 6 schools in Dili to us, we had the chance to speak with the headmasters and some of the English teachers of the schools. We were told more than once that the achievement and motivation of the East Timorese was less than that of the Indonesians living in East Timor. When we asked why, one reason given was that many children still had problems speaking Indonesian.
No-one could explain why lessons were not conducted through Tetum - the national language of East Timor.
When we brought up the subject of the high number of orphans in East Timor the subject was evaded with only the mentioning of the similarity of the situation with the civil war in Yugoslavia (!)

Roll Of The Portuguese Language And Culture:

The Portuguese influence is unmistakable. More than a few people said "hello" to us in Portuguese and we were often asked if we spoke Portuguese. There were, however, no books available in Portuguese or in a language other than Indonesian (apart from a few school books for English). It wasn't even possible to get a Tetum-Indonesian dictionary although in Bali for example Balinese dictionaries were available.
In the rural areas many of the native East Timorese had no way of verbal communicating with the Indonesian police there as they didn't have a common language.

Role of The Catholic Church:

The Catholic church obviously has an important role in East Timor. There are also many small Protestant groups but they seem to reach only the Indonesians living there. The East Timorese have a lot of faith in the church but for the Catholic priests - especially those in rural areas - the situation is difficult. Any foreign priests that want to stay in East Timor now have to take up Indonesian citizenship. This will be particularly difficult for Portuguese priests. The Portuguese director of the "Seminari Bunda Maria Fatima" for example was replaced by the German born Jesuit Karl Albert, whom we met.

SUMMARY:

The situation in East Timor is far from normal. The people are afraid. There is a constant presence of the army and the police. However, the East Tiomorese we spoke to always said that tourists should come to East Timor so that East Timor wasn't forgotten.

Appendix:
In addition to our meetings with East Timorese in Timor we also spoke with East Timorese students in Yogyakarta. On August, 12 and 13. These conversations only highlighted our impression of the atmosphere of repression and fear that reigns in East Timor.